

PETER, THE APOSTLE.

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[Written by request and read at the New Hope prayer-meeting.]

The original name of this apostle was Simon, the surname Peter having been conferred by Christ, Mark 3: 16. He was the son of one Jonah, or John, as the version has it. Peter means a rock or stone. Whether there was anything in the natal character of Simon that entitled him to the cognomen Peter, seems doubtful, as he swerved from the strict morality at the very moment, of all others, when, according to the judgment of ordinary individuals, he should have stood firm as a rock. Matt. 26: 69-75. But he never lost faith in his master, remaining firm as the rocks, even to the death of martyrdom. Peter's first lessons in the Gospel of Christ were undoubtedly from the teachings of John the Baptist, which appears evident by the readiness with which he accepted the call of the Savior. Matt. 1: 16. He seems to have been a man of ready wit and impulsive nature, the latter no doubt, lending force to his oratory, which was of no mean order. His original idea of Christ as a deliverer was that which was common among the Jews of his day, that was, that he should deliver them from the thralldom of the Roman yoke and become their secular king. This accounts for the fact that Peter had not fully cast off the old man of sin, as evidenced by his conduct on the day when Christ was brought before Pilate. Reared under the covenant of circumcision which was void of the doctrine of regeneration, Peter, with others of the apostles did not yet fully understand the Savior's mission. But, the resurrection of Christ from the dead and his ascension to heaven, put quite a different idea into the mind of Peter, and made a new man of him. He now saw that the kingdom of Christ was one of morality, of peace, justice, mercy, equity, purity and fraternal love; a subjection of the flesh to the spirit of holiness, and from thence until his death, there was not, among all the disciples, a more devoted one to the cause of his Master. From thence forward, he sacrificed every inclination of the flesh that stood in the way of a complete obedience to the will of his Savior. Everything that offered a hindrance to the free course of the spirit was brushed aside as an enemy to the cross. He was then fully equipped to strengthen his brethren. Luke 22: 32. He could then say with Paul, "the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Gal. 2: 20. He now confidently looked forward "to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in

heaven" for all saints. I Peter 1: 4. He could now pour forth his soul with such assurance, and such fervency of spirit and utterance, that three thousand were converted on one occasion and five thousand on another. Acts 2: 41: and 4: 4.

Let us now consider Matt. 16: 16. "Whom say ye that I am." Peter answers, "thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." May we not reasonably conclude that this answer expressed the rock-like faith of Simon? That ever-abiding, immovable, indestructible faith in Jesus as the Son of God, from which "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come," could move him, therefore Christ says, "thou art Peter," that is to say, thou art firm, thou art rock, thy faith has the quality of rock against which the floods may beat and the winds blow, but it will not be moved, yea, the powers of hell itself cannot move it. "Upon this rock I will build my church," not upon thee, but this rock of faith. Reason itself teaches that faith is the foundation and superstructure upon which the church rests. "Christ himself being the chief-corner-stone." There can be no church of Christ without faith in Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world; faith in Christ is the first thing in the Christian life. All other things in the Christ-life are the outgrowth of such faith, therefore it may be truly termed the foundation rock of the church, against which all the powers of hell shall not prevail; this is witnessed by the thousands of Christian men and women who suffer martyrdom of their faith in Christ.

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Notice the personal reference to Peter as the recipient of a special power or authority, also the "whatsoever." Now if we can fully comprehend the meaning of "keys" and "whatsoever" as here used, then, and not until then, will we be able to understand the power or authority that Christ conferred upon Peter. The term keys we may understand to mean the authority and wisdom to decide in cases arising in church government. Every case coming before the church for adjudication, having its own peculiar features, requiring its own special remedy, to be found in the Christian system, either by direct precept in the Gospel, or by application of its general principles. These are the keys and they will be selected by invocation of enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit. This gives us a clue to the limit of the seemingly unlimited word "whatsoever." If "keys" is limited to church government, whatsoever is likewise limit

ed. Whatsoever is locked or unlocked by the prescribed key in church trials, stands sanctioned in heaven. Any other view would extend to doctrine and justify the pontific assumption that the mode and formula of baptism and other church ordinances may be changed by ecclesiastical authority. It would also seem to justify the Roman idea of a special personal vicergerent of Christ upon earth.

The exegesis here given seems fully warranted by reference to Matt. 18: 18, where the subject of church government is under consideration and Christ says, "whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven," etc. We here notice that the power apparently conferred on Peter individually in the first instance, is here conferred on the church collectively; therefore we may reasonably conclude that Peter was merely empowered to act as foreman in the council among the apostles, for which he was well fitted by nature and grace. This view seems justified by the case recorded in Acts 15, and others.

NATURE.

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Let us often, aye often, lose ourselves in contemplating the exquisitely lovely creations of nature. There is not one natural object in the whole universe, but that appeals most touchingly to our love of the beautiful. True artistic skill has done much to beautify, but has it not also done much to disfigure the fair face of nature? As the animal intellect or inventive powers of man became developed without reason to guide, so did they construct artificial forms of beauty and pernicious customs, alike in the political, social and religious world. But as time advanced, and man's physical nature attained a higher degree of development, his intellect began to unfold itself. Like the child, who, the nearer it approaches its corporeal maturity, the more rapidly does its mental powers increase in sin and activity. The progressive unfolding of physical and spiritual nature is somewhat analogous to the developing process of the little plant on which he exists.

Natures unfoldings and developments we behold on every side; now as spring is arraying herself in her beautiful garb of green, are we not strongly impressed, while in contemplation of her rich beauties, with the beauty and grandeur she presents? Who has not, while coursing down the meandering stream of life, when fatigued and perplexed, and perhaps both mentally and physically sick, sallied forth from amid the noisy, busy scenes of strife, and felt the soothing, purifying influence